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ACTION EAP-00

INFO LOG-00 NP-00 ACQ-00 CIAE-00 DS-00 FBIE-00 UTED-00
VC-00 TEDE-00 INR-00 LAB-01 VCE-00 DCP-01 NSAE-00
SCT-00 SS-00 TEST-00 USIE-00 ASDS-01 IIP-00 DSCC-00
DRL-02 NFAT-00 SAS-00 /005W

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FM AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5613
INFO AMEMBASSY HANOI
ASEAN COLLECTIVE
USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI
JICPAC HONOLULU HI
SECDEF WASHDC
DIA WASHDC
NSC WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 HO CHI MINH CITY 001183

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/BCLTV AND EAP/PD/MSPEER
DEPARTMENT ALSO FOR DRL
CINCPAC FOR FPA
SECDEF FOR ISA/EA/ABLAGG

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL PHUM PTER VM HUMANR CTERR](#)

SUBJECT: FORMER SAIGON COMMUNIST PARTY CHIEF REFLECTS ON FIGHT AGAINST TERRORISM AND VIETNAM HUMAN RIGHTS ACT
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1. SUMMARY: IN A MEETING WITH EAP/BCLTV DIRECTOR JUDITH STROTZ, FORMER SAIGON COMMUNIST PARTY SECRETARY TRAN BACH DANG EXPRESSED SUPPORT FOR THE U.S. FIGHT AGAINST TERRORISM. HE ALSO EXPRESSED HIS EXTREME DISAPPROVAL OF THE VIETNAM HUMAN RIGHTS ACT (PENDING BEFORE THE SENATE) BECAUSE, HE SAID, IT SINGLES OUT VIETNAM UNFAIRLY FROM AMONG OTHER COUNTRIES. THE CONVERSATION WITH DANG, A SENIOR VIETNAMESE STATESMAN, REFLECTED THE COMPLEXITIES AND LINGERING AMBIVALENCE IN THE U.S.-VIETNAM RELATIONSHIP. END SUMMARY.

ADVICE FROM THE COMMANDER OF THE SAIGON TET OFFENSIVE

2. MEETING WITH EAP/BCLTV DIRECTOR STROTZ ON OCTOBER 8 AT HIS RESIDENCE, DANG SAID HE WAS "SHOCKED" AT THE ATTACK ON THE WORLD TRADE CENTER. HE SAID THE KILLING OF CIVILIANS WAS SIMPLY "UNACCEPTABLE." THE 75-YEAR-OLD DANG, WHO WAS COMMUNIST PARTY SECRETARY FROM 1965-73, TOLD STROTZ THAT IN 1968, HE WAS COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE TET OFFENSIVE IN SAIGON AND CHOLON. "WE ATTACKED THE U.S. EMBASSY IN SAIGON, BUT WE NEVER CONSIDERED THAT TO BE A TERRORIST ACT." DANG SAID HE SUPPORTED THE U.S. FIGHT AGAINST TERRORISM AND ALSO WOULD SUPPORT THE OVERTHROW OF THE TALIBAN IN AFGHANISTAN.

3. DANG RECALLED THAT WHEN THE VIET MINH WAS CONSOLIDATING ITS POWER IN THE 1950'S, IT FOUGHT SEVERAL BATTLES AGAINST THE HOA HAO BUDDHIST MILITIA IN SOUTHERN VIETNAM. "WE HAD GUNS," HE SAID. "THE HOA
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HAO HAD ONLY KNIVES AND STICKS." AFTER KILLING THE FIRST WAVES OF HOA HAO FORCES, HE SAID, THE VIET MINH REGROUPED, NOT BECAUSE OF LOSSES, BUT BECAUSE "WE FELT WE COULDN'T KILL PEOPLE THAT WAY." DANG SUGGESTED THAT IF U.S. GROUND FORCES LANDED IN AFGHANISTAN, THEY COULD FACE A SIMILAR COMPLEX SITUATION. HE SAID THE U.S. SHOULD RELY ON THE NORTHERN ALLIANCE OR ANOTHER AFGHAN GROUP TO OVERTHROW THE TALIBAN. IN A STATEMENT THAT SEEMED IRONIC COMING FROM THE VIET CONG VETERAN, DANG ECHOED VIETNAM, THE OLD COMMUNIST PARTY CHIEF SAID THAT WITHOUT THE SUPPORT OF THE AFGHAN PEOPLE, IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT FOR THE U.S. TO PREVAIL.

4. NOTING THAT HE WAS MADE AN HONORARY CITIZEN OF LUBBOCK, TEXAS AND AN HONORARY MEMBER OF THE U.S. ROTARY CLUB DURING HIS FIRST VISIT TO THE U.S. IN 1999, DANGHE SAID HE HAS MANY AMERICAN FRIENDS. HE SAID HE REGRETTED THE POSSIBLE LOSS OF U.S. LIVES AND ADVISED THAT MILITARY ACTIONS IN AFGHANISTAN BE SWIFT BECAUSE U.S. SOLDIERS WOULD HAVE A DIFFICULT TIME IN THE AFGHAN WINTER. DANG SAID HE OPPOSES TERRORISM IN ANY FORM,

INCLUDING ACTS OF TERRORISM BY PALESTINIAN GROUPS OR PERSONS. HE NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT HE BELIEVED U.S. POLICIES TOWARD ISRAEL VIS--VIS THE PALESTINIANS WERE "DANGEROUS." HE SAID HE THOUGHT THE U.S. SHOULD USE ITS POWER TO "RESTRAIN ISRAEL."

15. EAP/BCLTV DIRECTOR STROTZ THANKED DANG FOR HIS INSIGHTS AND SUPPORT. SHE ADDED THAT THE U.S. DOES NOT WISH TO SEE AFGHAN CIVILIANS KILLED OR INJURED AND THAT THE U.S. HAS LAUNCHED A LARGE HUMANITARIAN EFFORT TO
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ASSIST THE AFGHAN PEOPLE. SHE SAID THE U.S. WAS LEADING DIPLOMATIC AND FINANCIAL EFFORTS, NOT JUST MILITARY EFFORTS, TO FIGHT TERRORISM.

"SHUT THE VIETNAM HUMAN RIGHTS ACT UP IN A DRAWER"

16. EAP/BCLTV DIRECTOR STROTZ ASKED DANG TO EXPLAIN THE STRONG REACTION IN VIETNAM AGAINST THE VIETNAM HUMAN RIGHTS ACT (VNHRA) CURRENTLY PENDING BEFORE THE SENATE. IN AN OFTEN EMOTIONAL VOICE, THAT AT TIMES SHOWED EMOTION, DANG SAID THE ACT WENT AGAINST INTERNATIONAL NORMS AND BEHAVIOR. "BY ITS VERY NAME, IT SINGLES OUT VIETNAM," HE SAID. HE ADMITTED VIETNAM WAS "NOT PERFECT" IN TERMS OF HUMAN RIGHTS, BUT NOTED THAT ITS HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD WAS NOT POOR IN COMPARISON TO OTHER COUNTRIES SUCH AS AFGHANISTAN.

17. ACCORDING TO DANG, VIETNAM FOUGHT UNTIL 1975 TO OBTAIN THE MOST BASIC OF HUMAN RIGHTS - INDEPENDENCE. HE SAID ANOTHER BASIC HUMAN RIGHT WAS HAVING ENOUGH TO EAT. IN 1944-45, TWO MILLION VIETNAMESE DIED OF STARVATION UNDER JAPANESE OCCUPATION. IN COMPARISON, HE SAID, TODAY'S HUMAN RIGHTS PROBLEMS ARE LAUGHABLE. VIETNAM'S LEADERS ARE ATTEMPTING TO IMPROVE ITS CITIZENS' HUMAN RIGHTS, DANG SAID, BUT IMPROVEMENTS CANNOT HAPPEN OVERNIGHT.

18. EAP/BCLTV DIRECTOR STROTZ DETAILED SOME OF THE BACKGROUND OF THE VNHRA. SHE EXPLAINED THAT SOME MEMBERS OF CONGRESS WANTED TO BALANCE THEIR PASSAGE OF THE BILATERAL TRADE AGREEMENT WITH AN EXPRESSION OF THEIR CONCERN ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS IN VIETNAM. SHE ALSO NOTED THAT THE ACT CONTAINED A PRESIDENTIAL WAIVER TO SOME OF ITS MAIN PROVISIONS.

19. DANG WAS NOT IMPRESSED. HE SAID VIETNAM'S IS "NOT A BARBARIC GOVERNMENT," AGAIN POINTING TO THE TALEBAN, BUT THE VNHRA ESTABLISHES THE UNITED STATES AS VIETNAM'S JUDGE IN ITS OWN INTERNAL AFFAIRS. HE NOTED THAT IN THE PAST, POL POT CAUSED "TERRIBLE DESTRUCTION," BUT THE U.S. PROTESTED KHMER ROUGE ACTIVITIES BELATEDLY. "BUT WE SHOULD PUT THE PAST BEHIND US," HE SAID. "I SUGGEST THE VNHRA BE SHUT UP IN A DRAWER. INSTEAD, WE SHOULD GIVE EACH OTHER ADVICE AS FRIENDS." HE ADDED THAT VIETNAM WAS WILLING TO CONTINUE ITS DISCUSSION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AS PART OF THE NORMAL DIPLOMATIC PROCESS.

COMMENT

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110. AS A FORMER COMMUNIST PARTY LEADER AND CURRENT ADVISOR TO THE GOVERNMENT, DANG'S OPINIONS - GENUINE SYMPATHY AND SUPPORT FOR THE U.S. FIGHT AGAINST TERRORISM CHECKED BY INDIGNATION TOWARDS THE VNHRA - LIKELY REFLECT THOSE OF MANY OTHER OLDER GENERATION VIETNAMESE LEADERS.

111. BCLTV DIRECTOR STROTZ DID NOT HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO CLEAR THIS CABLE BEFORE DEPARTURE.

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